

Message Text

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ACTION SCS-03

INFO OCT-01 EUR-06 ISO-00 SCA-01 L-03 CPR-02 /016 W

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R 291212Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5667

AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

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FOR SCA/SCS AND EUR/SOV

E.O. 11652 N/A

TAGS: CDES UR (GRIMES, GEORGE)

SUBJ: REPORT OF DEATH: GEORGE GRIMES

REF: A) DEPT OM 1/23/74; B) MOSCOW 13817, NOV 5, 1973

1. SUMMARY: REPORT OF DEATH HAS NOT YET BEEN SUBMITTED IN CASE OF GEORGE GRIMES. EMBASSY EFFORTS TO OBTAIN WRITTEN CERTIFICATION OF CORRECT PLACE AND DATE OF DEATH, ITS CAUSE, AND AUTHORITY WHO CERTIFIED CAUSE, HAVE THUS FAR BEEN FRUSTRATED BY SOVIET BUREAUCRACY, PARTICULARLY PROTOCOL BRANCH OF INTOURIST.

2. EMBASSY REGRETS THAT A REPORT OF DEATH (FS-192) HAS NOT YET BEEN PREPARED AND SUBMITTED IN GRIMES CASE. AS NOTED IN PART IN REF B, THE SOVIET AUTHORITIES ISSUED A DEATH CERTIFICATE SHOWING GRIMES DIED ON OCTOBER 20 IN MOSCOW, WHEREAS AUTHORITATIVE OFFICIALS HERE ORALLY ADVISED THE EMBASSY THAT HE DIED ON OCTOBER 21 IN TYRNYAUZ, KARBARDINO-BALKARSKAYA USSR. EMBASSY EFFORTS TO OBTAIN A CORRECTED DEATH CERTIFICATE HAVE THUS FAR FAILED, AND TO DATE WE HAVE NOT RECEIVED AUTOPSY REPORT PROVIDING CAUSE OF DEATH.

(CAUSE OF DEATH IS NOT SHOWN ON CURRENT STANDARD SOVIET DEATH CERTIFICATES.) AS INDICATED BELOW, THE RESPONSIBLE SOVIET OFFICIALS MAY NOW BE UNWILLING TO CORRECT THE ORIGINAL CERTIFICATE BECAUSE THEIR OWN CONDUCT COULD BE CALLED TO ACCOUNT.

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3. DEPT WILL RECALL THAT RETURN OF GRIMES' BODY TO US WAS INEXPLICABLY DELAYED, AND EMBASSY, AT DEPT'S AND FAMILY'S REQUEST, KEPT PRESSING INTOURIST FOR ACTION. IN RETROSPECT IT SEEMS THAT CENTRAL INTOURIST AUTHORITIES, UNABLE TO OBTAIN A DEATH REPORT IN A TIMELY MANNER FROM DISTANT TYRNYAUZ, HAD THE MOSCOW CIVIL REGISTRY (ZAGS) FABRICATE THE NECESSARY CERTIFICATE. THAT CERTIFICATE WAS NECESSARY FOR DOCUMENTATION TO PERMIT SHIPMENT. INASMUCH AS THE MOSCOW ZAGS IS ONLY LEGALLY EMPOWERED TO REGISTER DEATHS IN MOSCOW, IT DESCRIBED PLACE OF DEATH AS MOSCOW. INASMUCH AS INTOURIST RECEIVED INFO*MATION OF THE DEATH AT LEAST SECOND-HAND (PERHAPS VIA MINISTRY OF NON-FERROUS METALLURGY), DATE WAS NOT THAT WHICH WAS INITIALLY PROVIDED EMBASSY. (FYI: AT THIS POINT, THE EMBASSY IS NOT ABSOLUTELY SURE WHAT DAY GRIMES DIED.)
4. CONSULAR OFFICERS HAVE SINCE WRITTEN THREE LETTERS TO INTOURIST (PROTOCOL CHIEF SIMCHENKO) AS WELL AS MADE NUMBER OF TELEPHONE CALLS IN EFFORT TO OBTAIN CORRECTED CERTIFICATE. ON DECEMBER 18 TWO CONSULS MADE PERSONAL CALL ON SIMCHENKO REQUESTING CORRECTED DEATH CERTIFICATE AND AUTOPSY REPORT IN GRIMES CASE AND AUTOPSY REPORT ONLY IN CASE OF BERTIE LEE GREENFIELD.
5. INTOURIST HAS NOT RESPONDED TO ANY OF THESE LETTERS OR APPROACHES. HOWEVER SIMCHENKO SAID CORRECTED CERTIFICATE CAN BE OBTAINED IF EMBASSY RETURNS THE ORIGINAL OF THE INCORRECT CERTIFICATE WHICH WAS AMONG ORIGINAL SHIPPING DOCUMENTS THAT ACCOMPANIED COFFIN. SIMCHENKO REJECTED PROFFERED XEROX COPY OF ORIGINAL. (COMMENT: IT IS CONSISTENT WITH PAST DEALINGS WITH SIMCHENKO TO BELIEVE HE MAY ONLY BE TRYING TO BUY MORE TIME. HOWEVER DEPT MAY WISH TO SEE IF ORIGINAL INCORRECT CERTIFICATE IS AVAILABLE FOR RETURN TO EMBASSY.) IN MOST RECENT TELEPHONE CONVERSATION, SIMCHENKO EVEN IMPLIED THAT NO CORRECTED DEATH CERTIFICATE WOULD BE MADE AVAILABLE TO EMBASSY UNTIL INTOURIST CLAIM (ABOUT 1300 RUBLES FOR HOSPITALIZATION) AGAINST AMCIT ZUPAN WAS SATISFIED (MOSCOW 809).
6. SINCE THE FALSE CERTIFICATE WAS PROBABLY EXTRACTED FROM LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MOSCOWZAGS THROUGH THE "COMPETENT ORGAN" CHANNEL (PROTOCOL CHIEF SIMCHENKO THROUGH HIS COUNTERPART IN ZAGS), THERE ARE ALSO BUREAUCRATIC/POLITICAL REASONS WHY THE PROCESS OF SECURING A CORRECTED CERTIFICATE HAS BEEN DIFFICULT. IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT THE OFFICIALS INVOLVED IN ISSUING THE INCORRECT CERTIFICATE COULD ALSO BE SUBJECT TO CERTAIN SANCTIONS FOR TAMPERING WITH RECORDS.

7. IN AN EFFORT TO END-RUN INTOURIST, EMBASSY MOST RECENTLY (JANUARY 24) SENT A LETTER TO TYRNYAUZ ZAGS REQUESTING INFORMATION ABOUT THE GRIMES DEATH. WE HAVE NOT YET RECEIVED A REPLY. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE GRIMES DEATH WAS NEVER REGISTERED IN TYRNYAUZ.

8. AS LAST RESORT EMBASSY CAN BRING ENTIRE MATTER TO ATTENTION MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN DIPLOMATIC NOTE, AND REQUEST MFA TO OBTAIN CORRECTED COPY AND AUTOPSY REPORT. THIS IS TIME-CONSUMING PROCESS, WITH OUTCOME NOT ENTIRELY CERTAIN. IT MAY ALSO COMPROMISE TO SOME DEGREE SIMCHENKO, FOR WHOM WE HAVE LITTLE REGARD BUT WHO REMAINS ONE OF EMBASSY'S KEY CONTACTS AT INTOURIST.

9. DEPARTMENT'S COMMENTS WOULD BE APPRECIATED. ALTHOUGH IT IS POSSIBLE THAT TYRNYAUZ ZAGS OR INTOURITS WILL FINALLY COME THROUGH, FURTHER EMBASSY ACTION MAY BE REQUIRED, ESPECIALLY IF FAMILY'S OR COMPANY'S NEED FOR FS-192 IS URGENT. IF DEPT BELIEVES IT WOULD BE USEFUL GIVEN SUCH NEED, A PRELIMINARY REPORT COULD BE PREPARED. EXEMPTDUBS

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